The free-flowing Rio Grande Wild and Scenic River winds its way through Boquillas Canyon.

Superintendent’s Welcome
Welcome to Big Bend National Park and the Rio Grande Wild and Scenic River! Your visit comes at an opportune time, as increasing visitation and pressures on park infrastructure put us at a crossroads. Today’s decisions have huge implications for the future, in both the developed and wild areas of these parks.

• In 2024, we expect to begin demolition of the old Chisos Mountains Lodge and construction of its replacement. The design and quality of the new, highly-sustainable facility is what this crown-jewel national park deserves. Thank you for your patience during the transition. We recognize that this will impact your experience greatly.

• Efforts to see permanent protection for more than 535,000 undeveloped acres of Big Bend are gaining momentum. This protection will not impact existing developments or uses in any way but will assure that our grandchildren experience Big Bend as we do today. You can help—see www.keeppbigbendwild.org. Superintendent Bob Krumenaker

What Can I See if I Only Have...

One Day:
Big Bend is too big to see in a single day, but for a taste of the park, visit the mountains, desert, and river with the following itinerary:
1) The Ross Maxwell Scenic Drive offers fantastic views of the Chihuahuan Desert landscape as you wind your way to the Rio Grande at Santa Elena Canyon. Scenic overlooks and exhibits along the way are well worth a stop. Short walks through Sam Nail Ranch, Homer Wilson Ranch, and the Castolon Historic District allow a glimpse into Big Bend’s past.

At the end of the scenic drive, take the short walk to the river and into Santa Elena Canyon—one of Big Bend’s most scenic spots and an easy 1.4 mile round-trip hike.

2) Visit the forested Chisos Mountains and walk the 0.3-mile Window View Trail to get a feel for the mountain scenery. If time allows, hike the Window Trail or Lost Mine Trail for a look at Big Bend’s mountain landscapes.

3) The Fossil Discovery Exhibit, located 8 miles north of Panther Junction, is another highlight that could easily fit into a one-day visit.

Three Days:
With three days to spend in the park, explore the major roads, do some hiking, and join a park ranger for a guided walk, talk, or evening program to learn more about Big Bend National Park. Consider spending a day in each of the three major areas of the park:
1) Visit the Chisos Basin and hike the Window Trail (5.6 miles round trip) or the Lost Mine Trail (4.8 miles round trip). Consult page 7 for trail descriptions of these and other popular trails in the park. Try to experience Big Bend’s wilderness as much as possible.
2) Explore the Ross Maxwell Scenic Drive and hike into Santa Elena Canyon (see “one-day” suggestions).

3) Drive to Rio Grande Village, stopping at Dugout Wells to walk the half-mile Chihuahuan Desert Nature Trail. The Rio Grande Village Visitor Center offers park information and interpretive exhibits.

Walk the Rio Grande Village Nature Trail. The bluff overlooking the Rio Grande at the end of the nature trail is a particularly beautiful spot at sunset. The Boquillas Canyon Trail, takes you into this spectacular canyon.

A Week:
With a week or more to spend in Big Bend, endless possibilities are open to you. You have plenty of time to explore the roads and hike or drive some of the “unimproved” dirt roads. For these, you’ll need a high-clearance or four-wheel drive vehicle; don’t forget to check at a visitor center for current road conditions.

The River Road, Glenn Springs Road, Old Ore Road, and Old Maverick Road are some of the more popular backcountry routes. A visit to the pool of water at Ernst Tinaja near the south end of the Old Ore Road is a Big Bend highlight.

If you have a high-clearance vehicle, improved dirt roads such as Dagger Flat and Grapevine Hills will get you “off the beaten path.” Hike the Chimneys, Mule Ears, or Grapevine Hills trails for a closer look at the desert environment.

If you’d like to explore the Chisos Mountains, trails to Boot Canyon, Emory Peak, and the South Rim offer good views of the park and take you into a world that seems far removed from the desert.

There are plenty of opportunities for overnight backpacking along these trails. A backpacking-permit is required to backpack and camp overnight.
The National Park Service was established on August 25, 1916, “...to conserve the scenery and the natural and historic objects and the wild life...and to provide for the enjoyment of the same in such manner and by such means as will leave them unimpaired for the enjoyment of future generations.”

Authorized by Congress in 1935 and established in June 1944, Big Bend National Park preserves the most representative example of the Chihuahuan Desert ecosystem in the United States.

Park Mailing Address
Big Bend National Park
PO Box 129
Big Bend National Park, TX 79834

Phone
800-252-0609

Park Websites
www.nps.gov/bibe
www.nps.gov/higr

On matters relating to the Paisano:
National Park Service
Editor, The Big Bend Paisano
PO Box 129
Big Bend National Park, TX 79834
bibe_info@nps.gov

This issue was printed with support from the Big Bend Natural History Association.

The National Park Service cares for the special places saved by the American people so that all may experience our heritage.

EXPERIENCE YOUR AMERICA™

Big Bend may be wild and unfamiliar country, but it need not be dangerous. Please review these guidelines for safety and resource protection.

Heat

The dry desert heat quickly uses up the body's water reserves. Carry and drink water—at least 1 gallon per person per day. As you exercise, you lose salt and water (over a quart and a half per hour during arduous exercise). You need both to survive in this extreme environment. Reduce alcohol and caffeine intake—the diuretic effects accelerate loss of body water. Protect your body—sensitive skin burns easily. Find shade, wear sunscreen, sunglasses, and a brimmed hat. Wear long-sleeves, long pants, and sturdy shoes.

Hiking

Trails vary from easy and well-maintained to strenuous, primitive routes. Plan hikes within your ability. Avoid ridges during thunderstorms and canyons or creek beds when flash flooding is possible. Carry a flashlight and first aid kit, and let someone know where you are going and when you expect to return. If you get hurt or lost, stay in one place to conserve water and energy.

Water Conservation

• Visitors are limited to 5 gallons of water per day when refilling containers; please conserve water while in the park.
• Don't let faucets run unnecessarily.
• Wash only what clothing items you need.
• Fill water jugs and bottles at Rio Grande Village whenever possible.
• Consider topping off RV water tanks outside the park.
• Take brief showers.
• Please report water leaks in park facilities to a ranger.
• Use backcountry water sources sparingly; leave backcountry springs for wildlife.

Wildlife

Observe Big Bend's wildlife from a distance. Wildlife is protected in the park; it is illegal to harass or harm wildlife. Never feed wild animals. Feeding wild animals damages their health, alters natural behaviors, and exposes them to predators and other dangers. Protect wildlife and your food by storing food and trash securely. Venomous snakes, scorpions, spiders, and centipedes are active during warm months. Pay attention: check shoes and bedding before use and use a flashlight at night.

No Collecting

The mission of the National Park Service is to preserve all natural and cultural resources unimpaired for future generations. Taking rocks, arrowpoints, plants, or animals robs everyone of this heritage—once something is stolen, it cannot be replaced.

It is unlawful (and rude) to destroy, deface, injure, collect, or otherwise disturb park resources, including plants or animals (dead or alive), fossils, rocks, and artifacts. It is a violation to possess park resources. Please, take only pictures and leave only footprints.

Driving

Drive within the speed limit (45 mph in most areas) and watch for wildlife along the roadsides, especially at night. Park roads have narrow shoulders and some roads are steep and winding. Share the road with bicyclists and pedestrians. Pull off the road to take pictures—do not stop or pause in roadways. Please, slow down...and enjoy!

Drones/Unmanned Aircraft

Launching, landing, or operating an unmanned aircraft is prohibited in Big Bend National Park.

Your Fee Dollars at Work

There are 431 National Park sites across the country, and 108 of those—including Big Bend National Park—collect fees under the Federal Lands Recreation Enhancement Act. This act allows parks to collect fees for entrance and recreational activities.

Visititation in Big Bend has climbed in recent years and so has our revenue! Big Bend now collects a little over $2 million in recreation fees annually and the law dictates that 100% of that money stays in the National Park Service. Not only that, 80% of recreational fees collected in the park are reinvested right here in Big Bend!

Where does the other 20% go? The funds that we do not retain in Big Bend go to sites that don't collect fees and need additional funding for projects with direct benefit to visitors.

Approximately $1.7 million per year is spent directly on projects benefiting the visitor experience at Big Bend. These projects may include deferred maintenance projects or projects that improve park roads, campgrounds, trails, and visitor centers.

Below are a few of the recent projects made possible by money collected from park fees.

Lone Mountain Trail

This new 2.7-mile trail was completed in 2022 using recreation fee dollars. It is the first new trail in many years in Big Bend and one of the only trails around the Panther Junction Visitor Center area. The trailhead is located one mile north of Panther Junction.

The trail circumnavigates Lone Mountain, a remnant of a volcanic intrusion, providing unique views of the Chisos, Rosillos, and Dead Horse mountains.

Cottonwood Campground

In 2008, a major flood event washed away five campsites at Cottonwood Campground. In 2010, those five sites were rehabilitated using your fee money, increasing the total sites at Cottonwood from 24 to 29 and adding to the available inventory for visitors seeking to experience solitude and grand vistas from the comfort of their tent.

Providing Shade for Campers

Anyone who has camped at Big Bend knows shade is vital to an enjoyable trip. Shade is even more valued at Rio Grande Village campground where daily temperatures can exceed 100°F for more than 3 months out of the year. The lack of shade has also become strikingly obvious in recent dry years, as many of the shady cottonwood trees that once stood tall over the campgrounds have died.

Using recreation fee dollars, the park added more than twenty shade structures at Rio Grande Village Campground in 2022. This addition should make the campground more enjoyable for generations to come!
Visiting Mexico

A unique part of the Big Bend experience is crossing into rural Boquillas del Carmen, Mexico.

Operating Hours
Winter Hours: Wednesday to Sunday, 9am-4pm
Summer Hours: Friday to Monday, 9am-4pm

Days and hours of operation are subject to change.

A visit to Mexico is permitted through the Port of Entry during business hours only. There is no other legal access to Mexico within Big Bend National Park.

General Information
The Boquillas Port of Entry is operated cooperatively by the National Park Service and U.S. Customs and Border Protection. The facility is staffed by park rangers who can assist travelers with information about visiting the area.

Required Documents
At the time of publication, U.S. and Canadian citizens (of any age) must present a valid passport to enter Mexico and re-enter the United States. Visitors from countries other than the U.S. or Canada must call Customs and Border Protection at Presidio, TX (432-229-3349) for current required travel documents.

How do I get there?
Park at the Boquillas Crossing parking lot. Pass through the Port of Entry and take a small rowboat across the Rio Grande for a modest fee ($10 round-trip as of 5/22). Wading across the Rio Grande is not recommended if the river level is high.

Visitors hoping to spot a Colima Warbler usually have to make the strenuous, 9-mile round-trip hike to the bird’s main habitat in Boot Canyon. Occasionally they are spotted closer to the headwall on the upper portions of the Pinnacles Trail.

Good luck!

Birding in Big Bend

The park is recognized as a Globally Significant Bird Area.

Big Bend National Park is famous for its birding, with more documented species of birds visiting the park throughout the year than any other unit in the National Park System (approximately 490). The diverse array of habitats, ranging from the riparian corridor of the Rio Grande to the forested canyons of the Chisos Mountains, present an attractive stepping point for birds traveling along major migratory paths that intersect the park.

A good guideline for birding in Big Bend is to seek out areas where water and vegetation are most abundant, such as the Rio Grande, the Chisos Mountains, or desert springs, some of which are accessible by car. Generally, the most active time for birding is in the spring when many species are migrating through the park. However, patience, birding in Big Bend can be rewarding throughout the year.

The riparian corridor at Rio Grande Village offers some of the best year-round birding in the park. Consider walking the Rio Grande Village Nature Trail or visiting the Daniels Ranch picnic area west of the campground. A similar habitat is accessible between Cottonwood Campground and Santa Elena Canyon on the park’s west side.

The pilot-oak-juniper woodlands of the Chisos Mountains and their foothills also offer accessible, year-round birding and attract many species of birds that would not otherwise be found here. It is well worth the effort to hike into the higher elevations. During early summer you may spot the sought-after Colima Warbler, which is only found outside of Mexico in the Chisos Mountains.

Patience, a good field guide, and knowledge of where to look are the keys to locating birds in Big Bend. A checklist of birds available for purchase at any visitor center and is a great aid in determining which species are likely to be present and the habitats where they are found.

Birding Hot Spots

Panther Junction to Rio Grande Village
- Dugout Wells—shady cottonwood trees and a windmill at this desert oasis.
- Rio Grande Village Nature Trail—a boardwalk over the pond is an excellent area for waterfowl.
- Daniels Ranch Picnic Area—the cottonwood trees provide excellent shade to both resident and migrant species.

Ross Maxwell Scenic Drive
- Salt Flat Ranch—a windswept and large trees attract birds to this historic ruin.
- Blue Creek Trail—a half-mile from the Homer Wilson Ranch are the Red Rocks, an area known for Lucifer Hummingbirds.
- Cottonwood Campground—large trees here provide a haven for birds.

Chisos Mountains
- Basin area—many mountain birds can be found around the campground and developed areas.
- Boot Canyon—the nesting area of the Colima Warbler and other species.
- South Rim—this 2000’ cliff is known for falcons and swifts.

Visitors wanting to sell you their crafts. It is illegal to purchase souvenirs in these areas. Visitors are required to check in with Mexican immigration officials upon arrival in Boquillas.

What is in town?
Boquillas features two restaurants with food that is simple, fresh, and good. A bar features pool and other games. Residents often display wire sculptures, embroidered textiles, walking sticks, and other handicrafts for sale.

U.S. currency is accepted in Boquillas. Visitors are advised to bring smaller bills.

Border Merchants
Near the border, you may encounter small “souvenir stands” and Mexican nationals wanting to sell you their crafts. It is illegal to purchase these items in the park. Items purchased illegally are considered contraband and may be seized by law enforcement officers.

Port of Entry staff can answer questions about items that can be legally purchased in Mexico and imported through the Port. By purchasing souvenirs in Boquillas, you support the citizens of Boquillas, make the river corridor safer for all visitors, and help protect the resources of this ecosystem.

What to do after crossing into Mexico?

- Stop at either of the two restaurants
- Pick up some souvenirs from the “souvenir stands”
- Visit the Daniels Ranch
- Visit the Cottonwood Campground
- Visit the Santa Elena Canyon

The Paisano
Things to Do

The Lesser-Known Canyons of Big Bend

Santa Elena Canyon with its postcard-perfect views and its towering dark walls is certainly Big Bend’s jewel. However, if you’re looking to explore off the beaten path, Big Bend offers multiple canyons for exploration that appeal to all skill levels.

The following trails and routes are all exposed desert hikes. Big Bend experiences extreme heat throughout much of the year, so hike during cooler days and be sure to drink plenty of water by carrying one gallon per person per day. Trail guides are available for Dog Canyon/Devil’s Den and Mariscal Canyon Rim. Be sure to ask rangers at a visitor center for more information.

Tuff Canyon
Easy 0.75 miles roundtrip
Tuff Canyon, located along the Ross Maxwell Scenic Drive, offers two viewing areas and a trail that leads you into the canyon. “Tuff” refers to the white rock made of compressed ash particles. Along the trail, you’ll see evidence of Big Bend’s volcanic history. Look for hardened lava flow with holes from gas bubbles and ballistic blocks embedded into the canyon walls.

Red Rocks Canyon
Easy to Moderate. 2.5 miles roundtrip.
Red Rocks Canyon is a series of red rock pinnacle formations accessible from Homer Wilson Ranch. Follow the Blue Creek Trail along the wash. You’ll soon see geologic formations unique to this area of the park. The surface of these volcanic rocks has oxidized to a reddish tinge. Homer Wilson used this trail to move his sheep and goats to graze at higher elevations.

Dog Canyon and Devil’s Den
Moderate to Strenuous. 4 miles roundtrip.
Dog Canyon is a lesser-traveled yet well-marked trail. The trail is flat, marked by frequent cairns, and bordered by creosote bush. After reaching a wash, the trail leading left will take you to the eastern park boundary through Dog Canyon. If you’re up for 3 miles of more strenuous adventure, go right at the wash to continue to Devil’s Den. This narrow canyon is a challenge; it’s better suited for experienced boulderers.

Mariscal Canyon Rim
Strenuous. 6.5 miles roundtrip to the rim.
You might wonder where the “big bend” of Big Bend is. Mariscal Canyon Rim trail will lead you to the “point” of the Rio Grande’s “big bend.” From the paved road, it takes two hours in a high clearance, 4-wheel drive vehicle to access the trailhead. The first two miles of the trail traverses relatively gentle hills. The final mile of the trail becomes significantly steeper and rockier. Keep a close eye on cairns along the route. At the rim is a spectacular view of the Rio Grande framed by 1,400-foot vertical canyon walls.

The Five Best…

We asked park rangers and social media followers about their favorite bike rides, wheelchair-accessible trails, and places their children enjoyed. Here are their suggestions.

Accessible Trails

Fossil Discovery Exhibit. The covered, open-air exhibit is fully accessible by wheelchair. Open during daylight hours.

Window View Trail. This 0.3 mile paved loop trail offers excellent views of the mountains surrounding the Chisos Basin. Two benches are perfect for sunset viewing.

Panther Path. This paved path near the Panther Junction Visitor Center provides an introduction to native plants of the Chihuahuan Desert.

RGV Nature Trail. The first 100 yards of this trail are wheelchair accessible as it follows a boardwalk through a spring-fed wetland. Birds, fish, turtles, and other animals are often seen in the pond and surrounding vegetation.

Ross Maxwell Scenic Drive. Ross Maxwell Scenic Drive highlights the geologic splendor of Big Bend and offers many scenic overlooks and exhibits with paved parking. Cottonwood Campground has shaded picnic tables and is a premier location in the park to look for birds.

Bike Rides

Ross Maxwell Scenic Drive Loop. Start at the west entrance, ride Ross Maxwell Scenic Drive to Santa Elena Canyon, and return on the Old Maverick Road. 56 miles (43 paved road, 13 dirt road).

Chisos Basin to Santa Elena Canyon. One way, 46 miles on paved road.

Red Rocks Canyon to Panther Junction. 20 miles one-way on paved road.

Old Ore Road. 26 miles one way on rough dirt road.

Kid’s Play

Stargaze.
Stay up late and look for the Milky Way. Safe places to stargaze include the Fossil Discovery Exhibit and Sotol Vista Overlook.

Go to Mexico.
Cross the river and explore the Mexican village of Boquillas. Laura: “My kids love buying tacos in Boquillas.”

Splash Around.
Play in the Rio Grande at Santa Elena Canyon, Boquillas Canyon, or the Hot Springs. (Warning: it’s best to keep river water out of ears, eyes, and mouths.)

Boulder Scramble.
Mini-mountainers love to boulder scramble the Upper Burro Mesa, Ernst Tinaja, and Grapevine Hills trails. Russell: “The scramble up to Balanced Rock was a highlight when our kids were in elementary school.”

Time Travel.
Explore the world of dinosaurs at the Fossil Discovery Exhibit. Sally: “We loved the fossil exhibit—definitely a must see!”

Pets in the Park

Having a pet with you may limit some of your explorations in the park. Following these pet regulations will ensure a safer, more enjoyable visit for yourselves, other park visitors, your pet, and the park’s wildlife.

• Pets are not allowed on trails, off roads, or on the river. Your pet can only go where your car can go.
• Pets must be on a leash no longer than six feet in length (or in a crate) at all times.
• You may not leave your pet unattended in vehicles if it creates a danger to the animal or if the animal becomes a public nuisance.
• If you plan to hike, someone must stay behind with the pet, or you will need to kennel your pet. The Alpine Veterinary Clinic (432-837-3888) and the Alpine Small Animal Clinic (432-837-5416) offer these services.
• Park regulations require that you always clean up after your pet and dispose of waste in trash receptacles.

The Paisano
Infrastructure Improvements COMING SOON!
*The Great American Outdoors Act*

Signed into law in 2020, the landmark Great American Outdoors Act commits energy revenues to address the multi-billion-dollar maintenance backlog in national parks and other public lands. In Big Bend, two much-needed infrastructure projects received funding as part of this effort. By spring 2024, park visitors will see work beginning on the following major endeavors:

**A New Lodge Building**

Constructed in 1964, the main Chisos Mountains Lodge is an important part of the park’s history. Generations of visitors have enjoyed the building’s modern aesthetic, large open interior, and expansive windows that frame the surrounding mountains and the classic view of “The Window.” Unfortunately, the Lodge was built on unmitigated clay soils and soon suffered as the foundation moved and settled. Over the years, the settling has caused significant damage to the foundation, roof, walls, windows, and building systems. Maintaining the building is no longer sustainable. In addition, burgeoning Big Bend visitation has far surpassed the kitchen and dining service capabilities of the facility.

In 2018, park staff began to evaluate solutions for a facility to serve the next generation of Big Bend visitors. Engineering studies established that repairing the failing foundation would require the complete removal of all walls and major features of the Lodge. The best option was to build a new building within the same footprint—a well-engineered facility that fits the landscape and meets high standards for energy, water, and operational efficiency to better serve the visitors of today and tomorrow. In 2022, the NPS and Architectural Resources Group developed conceptual designs for a new Lodge. The preferred design recognizes the Mission 66 aesthetic but includes improvements. The proposed building is clad in natural stucco, stone, and fire-resistant siding to blend with the environment. An elegant, angled roof oriented to the south, allows for solar panels to capture energy throughout the day. Future visitors will enjoy the mountain views from the expansive outdoor terrace and reception area. For efficiency, the new retail store consolidates both the gift shop and camper store on the ground floor and with a “grab-and-go” food service.

Behind the scenes, the mechanical equipment, food storage, and commercial kitchen are carefully designed to ensure the utmost in energy and water efficiency.

**Replace Aged Waterlines**

Water is the lifeblood of any desert, and in Big Bend, park managers are committed to using it as efficiently and responsibly as possible. To that end, a concurrent project will address the aging water distribution lines in the park’s developed areas, including the 3-mile pipeline from Oak Spring up to the Chisos Basin. Many of those lines date to the 1950s and have far exceeded their useful lives. By repairing or replacing damaged lines, upgrading storage tanks, and eliminating leaks, this project will ensure that the desert’s most critical resource remains available for thirsty plants, wildlife…and people.

**Pardon our Dust!**

Work on these much-needed projects will begin in 2024. Significant disruptions to visitor services are expected. Stay tuned as construction timelines are established or ask a ranger for the latest updates as we work to improve facilities and services at your park.

**Big Bend News**

**Just Being Wild**

*Wildlife Cameras Provide A Peak Into the Private Lives of Animals*

A coyote glances at you before melting into the bushes. A bear huffs at you as her cubs stand up a tree. Seeing wildlife in Big Bend is always a thrill, but what we witness is often a reaction to our presence. What do animals do when people aren’t around?

Thomas Athens, Big Bend National Park wildlife biologist, and Dr. Eric Anderson, park volunteer and Professor Emeritus of Wildlife Ecology at the University of Wisconsin, had an idea: establish a network of wildlife cameras across the Chisos Mountains.

“We want to monitor the wildlife from the foothills at about 3500 ft. to the mountain peaks at over 7900 ft.,” Anderson says. Over the long term, the cameras will help Thomas Athens answer questions about the movement of animal populations in response to climate change or the spread of invasive exotics such as wild hogs or elk.

But the immediate value is the ability to gather basic information about activity patterns of wildlife in the park. Who lives where? How do they behave seasonally? Daily? How do animals react to temperature or water availability changes?

“The wildlife biologist bought himself 12 sentinels to stand in one place in the park and watch 7 days a week, 24 hours a day,” says Anderson.

**Establishing a Camera Network**

Placing a camera is an art of its own. First, a 12-square grid—each cell within the grid representing 16 sq. km—was draped over a map of the Chisos Mountains. Science and Resource Management staff and volunteers then attached a single camera to a tree or post in each grid cell. But not randomly. This is where the art comes in.

“There are two aspects to an animal being in a location,” says Anderson. “One: is the habitat suitable? But then there’s the detectability. Maybe the animal is there, but we didn’t detect it because we have the camera in the wrong spot.”

The right spot has food, cover, and water. The ideal spot is a funnel where animals move from low to high elevation or from a resting place to a foraging area or watering hole.

Of course, the cameras must also be accessible to park staff and volunteers who check camera batteries and swap out image cards once a month. Then comes the fun part.

**Big Bend Wildlife**

Over the last year, staff and volunteers sorted and identified over 15,000 wildlife photos. The quizzical grey fox, with its long, bushy tail, coal-black eyes, and alert ears, was the most common of the 21 species photographed. But the cameras also documented some surprises. Long-tailed weasel (*Mustela frenata*), porcupines (*Erethizon dorsatum*), and hooded skunks (*Mephitis macroura*) all made an appearance.

And bears. Of course, there were bears. In 2021, bears were immortalized on camera 527 times. They were not distributed equally across the Chisos. Most bears preferred to hang out at mid-elevation—between about 4400 and 5300 ft. Anderson isn’t sure why. Was it because temperatures were ideal? Food was plentiful? Or was it because the South Rim fire burned through much of the high-elevation habitat in April 2021?

Bears were inactive in January through March—the traditional months of torpor. In July, bears were particularly active, moving from their spring food sources in the low elevation sotol-yucca grasslands to their summer/fall food sources in the mid-elevation oak woodlands. As with many desert animals, the cameras revealed that bears are most active near dawn and dusk.

Bears are okay, but Anderson has a soft spot for the big cats. “Deb [a park volunteer] set a camera down near a cottonwood tree at Oak Spring. We caught a female mountain lion and one of her cubs lounging there one night. They just lay there in front of the camera. Occasionally, they’d get up and tromp off into the woods after something they heard. We’d see them looking up at something in the trees. There’s a whole sequence of photographs that tell a really interesting story of one night in the life of these mountain lions.”

The camera traps gather valuable data for the wildlife biologist who can use the images to make informed decisions about wildlife management. But it’s also rewarding to see a mountain lion and her cub relax under the canopy of a cottonwood tree—without fear, without reacting to a human presence.

Park Ranger C.A. Hoyt
**Chisos Basin**
A drive to the Chisos Basin is an excellent way to experience the transition between arid desert and cooler mountain habitats. As this scenic, winding road rises over two thousand feet above the desert floor, it offers vistas of the mountain peaks and the erosion-formed basin area.

Within the Chisos Basin area is a visitor center, campground, lodge, restaurant, gift shop, camp store, and miles of hiking trails.

With limited time, walk the Window View Trail for easy access to mountain vistas and a classic sunset view. If time permits, consider hiking (or backpacking) into the High Chisos to witness the forested slopes of the Pinnacles Trail or the unparalleled vistas of the South Rim.

Note: the road into the Basin is not suitable for RVs longer than 24 feet or trailers longer than 20 feet.

**Rio Grande Village**
The drive to Rio Grande Village traverses limestone from a Cretaceous sea and has magnificent vistas of the Sierra del Carmens. Along the way is the oasis at Dugout Wells, and a spur road leads to the popular Hot Springs.

Continue the drive to Boquillas Canyon where a short hike follows the Rio Grande as it flows into the canyon.

Rio Grande Village has a visitor center, campground, RV hook-ups, camp store, gas station, and picnic area.

Take a stroll (or a short drive) from the store to Daniels Ranch; this is a great area for birding. Picnic tables are near the historic ruins.

The Rio Grande Village Nature Trail follows a wildlife-viewing boardwalk, then gradually climbs the hillside, offering panoramic views of the river, Sierra del Carmens, and Crown Mountain. This is an excellent sunset vista.

**Ross Maxwell Scenic Drive**
A trip along the Ross Maxwell Scenic Drive highlights the geologic splendor Big Bend is famous for and offers many scenic overlooks and exhibits along the way. Sotol Vista, Mule Ears Overlook, and Tuff Canyon are all worthwhile stops.

History is highlighted at Sam Nail Ranch, Homer Wilson (Blue Creek) Ranch, and the Castolon Historic District. Castolon has a visitor center, camp store, and nearby is the Cottonwood Campground.

Continue the drive to the magnificent Santa Elena Canyon, where limestone cliffs rise 1,500’ above the Rio Grande. A short trail leads into the canyon. If the river is high, you may have to wade across Terlingua Creek to access the trail.

Return by the same route, or drive Old Maverick Road to the western entrance of the park. This road is most suitable for high-clearance vehicles and may be impassable after heavy rains. Check at a visitor center or entrance station for current conditions.
Popular Trails

The Chisos Mountains

Smoking is prohibited on all trails in the Chisos Mountains.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Trail</th>
<th>Trailhead Location</th>
<th>Round Trip (mi/km)</th>
<th>Avg Time</th>
<th>Elevation (ft/m)</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Basin Loop</td>
<td>Chisos Basin Trailhead (near the Basin Store)</td>
<td>1.9/0.1</td>
<td>1 hour</td>
<td>280/85</td>
<td>Moderate Connects the Laguna Meadow and Pinnacles Trails. Nice views of the Basin area.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emory Peak</td>
<td>Chisos Basin Trailhead (near the Basin Store)</td>
<td>10/16.1</td>
<td>7 hours</td>
<td>2470/753</td>
<td>Strenuous Trail leads to the highest peak in the park, with excellent views. The end of the trail involves some challenging rock scrambling. Use caution on the climb down.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lost Mine</td>
<td>Basin Road, mile 5 (at the pass)</td>
<td>4/8.7</td>
<td>3 hours</td>
<td>1100/335</td>
<td>Moderate Excellent mountain and desert views. For a shorter hike, 1 mile up is a great view to the southeast.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>South Rim</td>
<td>Chisos Basin Trailhead (near the Basin Store)</td>
<td>12/19.3 (14/22.5 with the East Rim Trail included)</td>
<td>8 hours 10 hours</td>
<td>2000/610 2/120/646</td>
<td>Strenuous Trail leads to a 2000’ cliff with incredible views of the desert below. Hike either the southwest rim, or add the northeast and southeast rim trails when open.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Window</td>
<td>Chisos Basin Trailhead or Basin Campground</td>
<td>5.6/9.0 4.7/7.6</td>
<td>4 hours 3 hours</td>
<td>971/296 775/236</td>
<td>Moderate Descends to the top of the Window pour-off. Great scenery and wildlife viewing. For a shorter hike, start from the Basin Campground (near campsite 51).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Window View</td>
<td>Chisos Basin Trailhead (near the Basin Store)</td>
<td>0.3/0.5</td>
<td>1/4 hour</td>
<td>20/6</td>
<td>Easy Level, paved, accessible. Great mountain views. Best place in the Basin to catch a sunset through the Window.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Eastside — Panther Junction and Rio Grande Village

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Trail</th>
<th>Trailhead Location</th>
<th>Round Trip (mi/km)</th>
<th>Avg Time</th>
<th>Elevation (ft/m)</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Grapevine Hills</td>
<td>Balanced Rock 6.4 miles down the Grapevine Hills Road</td>
<td>2.2/3.5</td>
<td>1 hour</td>
<td>80/24</td>
<td>Moderate Follows a sandy wash through a boulder field. A steep, rocky climb near the end takes you to a large balanced rock. No shade.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lone Mountain Trail</td>
<td>Access road 1 mile north of Panther Junction 7.4/12</td>
<td>1.2/3</td>
<td>1.5 hours</td>
<td>200/61</td>
<td>Easy A relatively level loop trail with extraordinary views of the mountains.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chihuahuan Desert</td>
<td>Nature Trail Dugout Wells 0.5/0.8</td>
<td>0.5/0.8</td>
<td>0.5 hours</td>
<td>10/3.5</td>
<td>Easy Loop trail with interpretive signs on desert ecology. Look for javelina tracks and resident birds.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hot Springs</td>
<td>End of Hot Springs Road (unpaved narrow road) 0.5/0.8</td>
<td>0.5/0.8</td>
<td>0.5 hours</td>
<td>10/3.5</td>
<td>Easy Walk past historic buildings to the riverbed hot spring. Enjoy a soak in 105°F water. Red Spring is subject to flooding during rising river levels.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Boquillas Canyon</td>
<td>End of Boquillas Canyon Road 1.2/2</td>
<td>1.2/2</td>
<td>1 hour</td>
<td>102/31</td>
<td>Easy Begins with a short climb, then descends via a sandy path to the river.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rio Grande Village</td>
<td>Nature Trail Rio Grande Village, across from campsite 18. Park at the Rio Grande Amphitheater parking lot. 0.75/1.2</td>
<td>0.75/1.2</td>
<td>0.75 hours</td>
<td>80/24</td>
<td>Easy First 300’ leads to a wildlife viewing platform on a pond. Trail then climbs the hillside with views of the river and mountains. Great for birding and sunsets.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Westside — Ross Maxwell Scenic Drive

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Trail</th>
<th>Trailhead Location</th>
<th>Round Trip (mi/km)</th>
<th>Avg Time</th>
<th>Elevation (ft/m)</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sam Nail Ranch</td>
<td>Ross Maxwell Scenic Drive, mile 3 0.5/0.8</td>
<td>0.5/0.8</td>
<td>0.5 hours</td>
<td>20/6</td>
<td>Easy Well-maintained trail leads through the old ranch site. The combination of water and shade makes this an excellent birding location.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lower Burro Mesa</td>
<td>Pour-off Buro Mesa Spur Road 1.0/1.6</td>
<td>1.0/1.6</td>
<td>1/2 hour</td>
<td>120/37</td>
<td>Easy Trail enters a dry wash and ends at the bottom of the dramatic Burro Mesa pour-off. A great walk for viewing geological features.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chimneys</td>
<td>Ross Maxwell Scenic Drive, mile 13 4.8/7.7</td>
<td>4.8/7.7</td>
<td>2 hours</td>
<td>400/122</td>
<td>Moderate Flat and scenic desert trail to rock formations of an eroded dike. Look for Native American rock art and shelters. No shade.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mule Ears Spring</td>
<td>Ross Maxwell Scenic Drive, mile 15 3.8/6.1</td>
<td>3.8/6.1</td>
<td>3 hours</td>
<td>880/268</td>
<td>Moderate Beautiful desert hike to a small spring. Spectacular geology with mountain and desert views.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dorgan-Sublett Trail</td>
<td>Castolon to Santa Elena Canyon Road, near mile 5 0.8/1.3</td>
<td>0.8/1.3</td>
<td>1/2 hour</td>
<td>60/18</td>
<td>Easy This short easy trail leads to the ruins of historic farm houses owned by settlers in the early to mid-1900s.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Santa Elena Canyon</td>
<td>Ross Maxwell Scenic Drive, 8 miles west of Castolon 1.6/2.6</td>
<td>1.6/2.6</td>
<td>1 hour</td>
<td>80/24</td>
<td>Easy This trail crosses Terlingua Creek (usually dry) and gradually climbs up to an overlook before dropping to the river bank. Trail has some steep steps and can be very hot midday.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Smoking is prohibited on all trails in the Chisos Mountains.

Eastside — Panther Junction and Rio Grande Village

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Trail</th>
<th>Trailhead Location</th>
<th>Round Trip (mi/km)</th>
<th>Avg Time</th>
<th>Elevation (ft/m)</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Grapevine Hills</td>
<td>Balanced Rock 6.4 miles down the Grapevine Hills Road</td>
<td>2.2/3.5</td>
<td>1 hour</td>
<td>80/24</td>
<td>Moderate Follows a sandy wash through a boulder field. A steep, rocky climb near the end takes you to a large balanced rock. No shade.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lone Mountain Trail</td>
<td>Access road 1 mile north of Panther Junction 7.4/12</td>
<td>1.2/3</td>
<td>1.5 hours</td>
<td>200/61</td>
<td>Easy A relatively level loop trail with extraordinary views of the mountains.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chihuahuan Desert</td>
<td>Nature Trail Dugout Wells 0.5/0.8</td>
<td>0.5/0.8</td>
<td>0.5 hours</td>
<td>10/3.5</td>
<td>Easy Loop trail with interpretive signs on desert ecology. Look for javelina tracks and resident birds.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hot Springs</td>
<td>End of Hot Springs Road (unpaved narrow road) 0.5/0.8</td>
<td>0.5/0.8</td>
<td>0.5 hours</td>
<td>10/3.5</td>
<td>Easy Walk past historic buildings to the riverbed hot spring. Enjoy a soak in 105°F water. Red Spring is subject to flooding during rising river levels.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Boquillas Canyon</td>
<td>End of Boquillas Canyon Road 1.2/2</td>
<td>1.2/2</td>
<td>1 hour</td>
<td>102/31</td>
<td>Easy Begins with a short climb, then descends via a sandy path to the river.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rio Grande Village</td>
<td>Nature Trail Rio Grande Village, across from campsite 18. Park at the Rio Grande Amphitheater parking lot. 0.75/1.2</td>
<td>0.75/1.2</td>
<td>0.75 hours</td>
<td>80/24</td>
<td>Easy First 300’ leads to a wildlife viewing platform on a pond. Trail then climbs the hillside with views of the river and mountains. Great for birding and sunsets.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Westside — Ross Maxwell Scenic Drive

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Trail</th>
<th>Trailhead Location</th>
<th>Round Trip (mi/km)</th>
<th>Avg Time</th>
<th>Elevation (ft/m)</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sam Nail Ranch</td>
<td>Ross Maxwell Scenic Drive, mile 3 0.5/0.8</td>
<td>0.5/0.8</td>
<td>0.5 hours</td>
<td>20/6</td>
<td>Easy Well-maintained trail leads through the old ranch site. The combination of water and shade makes this an excellent birding location.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lower Burro Mesa</td>
<td>Pour-off Buro Mesa Spur Road 1.0/1.6</td>
<td>1.0/1.6</td>
<td>1/2 hour</td>
<td>120/37</td>
<td>Easy Trail enters a dry wash and ends at the bottom of the dramatic Burro Mesa pour-off. A great walk for viewing geological features.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chimneys</td>
<td>Ross Maxwell Scenic Drive, mile 13 4.8/7.7</td>
<td>4.8/7.7</td>
<td>2 hours</td>
<td>400/122</td>
<td>Moderate Flat and scenic desert trail to rock formations of an eroded dike. Look for Native American rock art and shelters. No shade.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mule Ears Spring</td>
<td>Ross Maxwell Scenic Drive, mile 15 3.8/6.1</td>
<td>3.8/6.1</td>
<td>3 hours</td>
<td>880/268</td>
<td>Moderate Beautiful desert hike to a small spring. Spectacular geology with mountain and desert views.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dorgan-Sublett Trail</td>
<td>Castolon to Santa Elena Canyon Road, near mile 5 0.8/1.3</td>
<td>0.8/1.3</td>
<td>1/2 hour</td>
<td>60/18</td>
<td>Easy This short easy trail leads to the ruins of historic farm houses owned by settlers in the early to mid-1900s.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Santa Elena Canyon</td>
<td>Ross Maxwell Scenic Drive, 8 miles west of Castolon 1.6/2.6</td>
<td>1.6/2.6</td>
<td>1 hour</td>
<td>80/24</td>
<td>Easy This trail crosses Terlingua Creek (usually dry) and gradually climbs up to an overlook before dropping to the river bank. Trail has some steep steps and can be very hot midday.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Keeping Big Bend Wild

Is Big Bend truly protected from future development?

Visiting Big Bend National Park provides a powerful and rare opportunity to experience vast, wild lands and almost unlimited vistas. Hikers can venture for days without encountering the sights or sounds of modern civilization. Even though most of us enjoy Big Bend without leaving the roads or trails, the knowledge that these wild lands are protected forever is one reason we love our park. But are they truly protected from future development? Park visitation is rapidly increasing. Does anything absolutely prohibit building new roads or other infrastructure, dissecting those vast open spaces? The answer is no.

The good news is that the National Park Service (NPS) is committed to protecting wild Big Bend. In 1997, the NPS formally recommended that about 2/3 of the park be designated as federal wilderness. Only Congress can make those protections permanent, and they have yet to act. In the absence of law, agency policy mandates that we preserve the wilderness values of Big Bend until Congress acts. But the protections we take for granted are not necessarily permanent. Policy is like a handshake deal—only as good as the commitment of the people involved. Big Bend visitation has increased rapidly in recent years. Pressure to develop more facilities is real and likely to increase. The NPS is committed to maintaining the quality and condition of the facilities in Big Bend’s developed areas, enhancing the visitor experience while preserving essential park values. Limiting infrastructure growth inside the park also encourages economic development in the gateway communities of Terlingua, Lajitas, Marathon, and Alpine. It’s a win-win-win:

But if current policy changes, roadless areas could be developed with new roads, campgrounds, or lodges, altering the character of the park forever. Wilderness designation would formalize protections against such changes and provide permanent protection for the open spaces we value so highly.

Defining Wilderness

The 1964 Wilderness Act passed Congress overwhelmingly. Signed by President Lyndon Johnson of Texas, it is one of the most eloquent laws ever written, lyrically defining wilderness and why it is crucial to protect it: “A wilderness, in contrast with those areas where man and his works dominate the landscape, is hereby recognized as an area where the earth and its community of life are untrammeled by man, where man himself is a visitor who does not remain.”

The land must be free of modern developments, retain its primeval character, and have outstanding opportunities for solitude or primitive recreation. Such areas are to be “devoted to the public purposes of recreational, scenic, scientific, educational, conservation, and historical use.”

We hear sometimes that wilderness “locks up” public land. Not so. The law requires that the land will be for the “use and enjoyment of the American people.”

Motorized vehicles and mechanical equipment are prohibited in wilderness, but trails, primitive campsites, and human-powered, non-mechanized travel are allowed. Since 1964, every president has signed laws creating new wilderness areas. National parks such as Death Valley, Everglades, Yosemite, and even Guadalupe Mountains here in Texas have substantial acreage protected as federal wilderness. Why not Big Bend?

FAQ About Wilderness at Big Bend

What are the advantages of wilderness designation?

The advantages of wilderness designation include:

1. Assuring future management can’t easily change direction and that our grandchildren can experience the park as close as possible to the way we do today.
2. Increasing opportunities for private businesses to provide visitor services such as food or accommodations outside park boundaries, a positive economic impact on gateway communities while limiting adverse impact on the park.
3. Protecting habitat and preserving our dark night skies.

Would Black Gap or other roads be closed? No. Neither Black Gap Road nor any other public road, paved or unpaved, would be closed.

How would wilderness designation change the way I access and use the Rio Grande? The Rio Grande and the roads that access the river are outside the recommended wilderness area, so river use would not be affected in any way.

What can I do to help protect wilderness areas?

The Opportunity We Have Now

We can fulfill the vision of previous generations at Big Bend National Park. A loosely organized “Keep Big Bend Wild” (KBBW) citizens group has raised the visibility of this issue. While the NPS did not initiate it, park leadership works closely with KBBW. KBBW is building a coalition by having conversations with people who care about the park, especially local businesses, landowners, and government officials. KBBW is strengthening relationships—and listening when concerns are raised. As NPS has protected these lands from development for decades, this effort is not about changing things in the park. The opportunity lies in reducing uncertainty about their future. KBBW will publish a draft map and seek community input on where the boundaries should be drawn to protect existing developments and roads while preserving forever the undeveloped core of the park as federal wilderness.

KBBW has committed that neither the Chisos Basin development, nor the Rio Grande, would be included in any wilderness map they offer to Congress. A Big Bend wilderness bill would assure continuity of management into the future, regardless of who the superintendent is or the policy of the administration in Washington at the time.

What You Can Do

More detail is at www.keepbigbendwild.org. Engage the people you know! The goal is to show that a broad spectrum of people and businesses across Texas believes protecting the wild lands of Big Bend forever is in the public interest. You can comment or ask questions on the KBBW website or contact me at BIBB Superintendent@nps.gov. I am happy to talk with anyone and meet with groups across the state to discuss wilderness and other park issues.
Nonprofit Partners

Big Bend Conservancy
Committed to supporting and preserving Big Bend National Park and the Rio Grande Wild & Scenic River.
The Big Bend Conservancy has raised over $4.3 million for projects in both park units. The goal of the Conservancy is to ensure the parks’ conservation while providing support for exceptional visitor experiences. To do this, the Big Bend Conservancy funds student fellowships, restoration projects, educational films, Fossil Discovery and James A. “Buddy” Davidson Trails endowments, and the Fossil Discovery Exhibit.

Opened in 2016, the $5 million Fossil Discovery Exhibit showcases Big Bend’s incredible fossil landscape in an award-winning green building designed to complement its natural surroundings. Generous donors established the Fossil Discovery Endowment in 2020. This permanent fund provides for the ongoing maintenance and upkeep of the exhibit.

Your contributions and support of the Conservancy directly impact Big Bend National Park. From trail maintenance and interpretive additions, sustainability initiatives to keep the park beautiful, recovery efforts in response to the Castolon fire, and land acquisition to promote continued conservation—every donation plays a part in keeping the park pristine.

If you’d like to take your love of the park along for a ride, consider purchasing a Big Bend license plate from the Big Bend Conservancy. Since 1997, thousands of Texans have shown their Big Bend National Park pride with a Big Bend license plate. The result? Almost $8 million contributed for trail signs, visitor center improvements, and numerous other park projects.

Keep your eyes out for the toothsome new fossil license plate launched in mid-2021! You can purchase either Big Bend license plate at bigbendconservancy.org

Join Us!
To become involved with the Big Bend Conservancy, make a donation, or learn more about events hosted by the Conservancy in the park and across the state, visit www.bigbendconservancy.org or call 512.549.5449.

Display your Big Bend pride with a license plate from the Big Bend Conservancy!

Big Bend Natural History Association
Supporting the park and park programs through bookstore sales.
BBNHA’s primary mission is to provide educational material to the visiting public in hopes that an educated public will love and support the parks and help preserve them for future generations. We carry popular and hard-to-find books about a wide variety of historical and scientific topics, detailed guides, and maps. These include some BBNHA original publications, plus some unique collectibles to help you remember its natural surroundings.

Part of our profits are used to support the educational and research efforts of the parks we serve and to also provide for purchases that can’t be made with government funds—for example, meals for search and rescue operations and volunteer appreciation socials. A small sample of the programs recently funded with BBNHA donations include:

• Junior Ranger books, pencils, and badges for more than 1000 children per year.
• Support for publication of The Paisano.
• Spanish translations for Magdalena House exhibits.
• Ongoing support for a series of new interpretive trailhead signs.
• Development and production of Bruno y Grande, a film extolling the Rio Grande Wild & Scenic River.
• A new Special Edition: 2023 Best of Big Bend Calendar, featuring some of the best photography that we have published over the years.

Despite fires, government shutdown, pandemic, and the high cost of gasoline, BBNHA has continued to find ways to serve our association members and park visitors. In 2020, we were closed for a full six months except for our online store, then an innovative staff set up shop outdoors on a patio with batteries, and we forged ahead.

Join Us!
We’re aided in our mission by more than 500 members, and we need your help. With an annual membership, you’ll receive our annual park calendar with photos by a select local professional photographer and narratives by park personnel. Members receive a 15% discount on items sold by BBNHA and a discount at over 400 other non-profit bookstores at national parks, forests, and monuments nationwide through the Public Lands Alliance (PLA). You are invited to join us in our educational mission by becoming a member in person at the Panther Junction bookstore or online at www.bbnha.org. Thank you so much for your ongoing support, especially during these challenging times.

BBNHA seasonal employee, Jenny Grayson and Butterfly Kitty Mouse Mow, enjoy the view from the front porch of the new duplex.

Big Bend Conservancy teamed up with the National Park Foundation and the Center for Big Bend Studies at Sul Ross State University to restore adobe work at the historic Alvino house in the Castolon area.

Big Bend license plate from the Big Bend Conservancy!

Display your Big Bend pride with a license plate from the Big Bend Conservancy!

BBNHA members receive a 15% discount on bookstore purchases.

This discount is honored at cooperating park bookstores nationwide.

The Paisano
Developed Campgrounds

Campgrounds include amenities such as flush or vault toilets, running water, grills, picnic tables, animal-proof storage boxes, and safety in numbers.

Chisos Basin
The Chisos Basin Campground is surrounded by tall, rocky cliffs and is conveniently located near some of the park’s most spectacular and popular trails. Due to the terrain, campsite size, and road access, this campground is not suitable for trailers over 20 feet and RVs over 24 feet. No hook-ups available.

Open: Year-round

Getting a Site: Campsites are available by reservation only. Two-thirds of the sites are reservable 6 months in advance; 1/3 are reservable 14 days in advance.

Group Camping: Seven tent-only group campsites are available for groups of at least 9 and up to 20 people. Group sites are by reservation only and cost $40 to $60 nightly.

Make a Reservation: www.recreation.gov or 877-444-6777

Cottonwood
Cottonwood Campground is a quiet, shady desert oasis located between Castolon Historic District and Santa Elena Canyon. A picnic area under the shade of mesquite trees is available for day use.

There are no hookups, no dump station, and generator use is not permitted.

Open: Year-round although limited in the summer (May through October).

Getting a Site: Campsites are available by reservation only. Reservations can be made up to 14 days in advance.

Group Camping: One group campground is available for 9 to 25 people. The site is a tent-only, walk-in campground. The group site is available by reservation only and costs $60 nightly.

Make a Reservation: www.recreation.gov or 877-444-6777

Rio Grande Village
The largest campground in Big Bend; it can accommodate large RVs or trailers. There are no hookups, but generators can be used in some sites during designated hours. A dump station is nearby. Coin-operated showers and laundry are located at the RGV store.

Open: Year-round although limited in the summer (May through October).

Getting a Site: Sites are by reservation only. Two-thirds of the sites are reservable 6 months in advance; 1/3 are reservable 14 days in advance.

Group Camping: Four tent-only group campsites are available for groups of 9 to 40 people. The group sites are available by reservation only and cost $60 to $80 nightly.

Make a Reservation: www.recreation.gov or 877-444-6777

Developed Campgrounds at a Glance

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Developed Campgrounds at a Glance</th>
<th>Elevation (feet/meters)</th>
<th>Sites</th>
<th>Fees</th>
<th>Facilities</th>
<th>Reservations</th>
<th>Comments</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Chisos Basin</td>
<td>5,401/1,646</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>$16.00*</td>
<td>Flush toilets, dump station</td>
<td><a href="http://www.recreation.gov">www.recreation.gov</a></td>
<td>Sites are not level; only some have shade.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cottonwood</td>
<td>2,169/66</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>$16.00*</td>
<td>Vault toilets, no generator use allowed</td>
<td><a href="http://www.recreation.gov">www.recreation.gov</a></td>
<td>In a cottonwood grove along the river. Partial shade.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rio Grande Village</td>
<td>1,850/56</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>$16.00*</td>
<td>Flush toilets, dump station</td>
<td><a href="http://www.recreation.gov">www.recreation.gov</a></td>
<td>Great birding area, near RGV Nature Trail.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rio Grande Village RV</td>
<td>1,810/56</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>$37.00 and up*</td>
<td>Privately operated, full hook-ups</td>
<td>432-477-2293</td>
<td>Only place in park with full hook-ups, check-in at the RGV store.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>* $8.00 with an Interagency Senior or Access Pass</td>
<td></td>
<td>Observe posted campground quiet hours.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Backcountry Camping and River Use

If you’re after solitude, dark skies, or a river trip, consider backcountry camping.

Primitive Roadsides Sites
All roadside campsites are along unpaved roads, and as a general rule were not designed for large RV’s or trailers. Some centrally located sites are accessible to most vehicles, however, a high-clearance and/or 4-wheel drive vehicle is necessary to reach those along the primitive dirt roads.

Sites are $8/night. Reserve most sites online at www.recreation.gov up to six months in advance. Permits for all other sites are written on a first-come, first-served basis at Panther Junction Visitor Center.

Sites offer a cleared gravel pad to park your vehicle and set up a tent. The only amenity at a backcountry campsite is a large animal-proof box to store food and other items. Please plan to bring everything you need, including water, shade, chairs, and a towel to bury human waste. Pack toilet paper out as trash—do not burn or bury it. Better yet, bring a self-contained, portable camp toilet.

Backcountry Permits
Camper enjoying a backcountry campsite.

How to Obtain a Permit:
Permits are required for any overnight backcountry camping, river use, or stock use, and can be obtained from the Panther Junction and Chisos Basin Visitor Centers.

Some sites are available for reservations six months in advance on Recreation.gov or by phone at 877-444-6777. Check out our website at www.nps.gov/bibe for more information.

• Permits can be written for up to fourteen consecutive nights from the first day of backcountry use.
• Backcountry use is subject to rules and regulations regarding sanitation and minimal impact practices that must be agreed to in order to obtain a permit.

Backcountry Backpacking
Do you dream of carrying everything with you as you hike to a beautiful campground? Big Bend National Park has over 200 miles of trails in the Chisos Mountains and the lower desert with numerous options for multi-day backpacking trips.

Chisos Mountains: Forty-one campsites—ranging from 1 to 8 miles from the trailhead—dot the high Chisos Mountains. These sites help reduce impact and damage to this delicate environment.

Sites include a cleared area for a tent as well as a bear-proof storage box. It’s important to use this box to store all scented items when camping. There are several composting toilets in the Chisos backcountry.

Most sites are reservable up to six months in advance on www.recreation.gov. A few sites are available on a first-come, first-served basis at Panther Junction Visitor Center.

Desert Backpacking: Experienced hikers wanting to camp in the park’s open desert areas can obtain a camping permit (1/day/nights) from the Panther Junction Visitor Center the day before or the day of, your first night in the backcountry.

River Use & Stock Permits
River Use Permits: Permits are required for anyone using canoes, kayaks, rafts, or other watercraft on the Rio Grande. Day-use permits are free. Permits for overnight use are $20/night and can be written up to 7 days in advance.

To obtain a permit, you must have a Coast Guard-approved life jacket for each person, an extra life jacket, and an extra paddle. If going on an overnight trip, you will also need a fire pan and a system for removing human waste. Check the park’s website or talk to a ranger for additional gear requirements.

Horse/Stock Permits: You must have a stock permit if you wish to ride your horse in the park. All gravel roads are open to riders. Horses are not permitted on paved roads or the shoulders of paved roads. Horse use in the Chisos Mountains is limited to Laguna Meadow, South Rim to the Boot Canyon Trail junction, and Blue Creek trails.

Grazing is not allowed in the park. Harnold Draw is the only campsite with a corral. Stock must not roam free; hobbles or tie them. Check the park website for more information about stock use in the park.
Black Bears

The return of black bears to Big Bend is a success story for both bears and the park. Originally native to the Chisos Mountains, bears disappeared from this area by the 1940s, in part, due to predator control agents. Nearly fifty years later, in the 1990s, bears returned from Mexico—crossing the river and the harsh desert to start breeding in the Chisos Mountains. Today, wildlife biologists estimate that there are around 20 to 30 black bears in the park.

A black bear’s normal diet consists largely of nuts, fruits, solot and yucca hearts. They will also eat small mammals, reptiles, and carrion. Bears normally avoid humans but can become aggressive if they learn to take food from human sources. Each campsite has bear-proof storage lockers for storing edibles. Hard-sided vehicles are also suitable for storing food and things that smell. Help us keep bears healthy and wild!

A rare example of a good predator is the mountain lion. Mountain lions live throughout the park—from mountain to desert. Biologists estimate a stable population of about two dozen lions. Every year, visitors report around 130 mountain lion sightings in Big Bend National Park. Over half are seen along roadway but encounters also occur on trails. To protect yourself (and the mountain lions), be aware of your surroundings and avoid hiking alone or at dusk and dawn. Watch your children closely. Never let them run ahead of you as they may look like prey to a hungry mountain lion.

Coyotes

Coyotes range over the entire United States. These highly adapted members of the canine family are omnivores, dining on small mammals, reptiles, and insects.

Coyotes will also eat berries and other vegetation when meat is unavailable. Carrion is an important food source in winter. Coyotes are typically solitary but will hunt in small groups when individuals converge in areas where food is plentiful. They will work cooperatively, either chasing an animal in relays to tire it or waiting in ambush. Unlike wolves, coyotes do not form lasting packs.

Javelina

Also known as collared peccaries, javelinas (pronounced hav-uh-LEE-nuhs) are only found in the U.S. in Texas, New Mexico, and Arizona. They are covered with black, bristly hairs and weigh between 40 to 60 lbs. They usually travel in bands that consist of 10 to 25 individuals. Javelinas have a highly developed sense of smell but poor vision. Physically, they resemble pigs, but are not closely related. Javelina eat prickly pear cactus, grasses, mesquite beans, python nuts, fruits, berries, and seeds.

Every year, campers report campsites being raptured by javelinas. Although not normally aggressive, they can be when food is involved. Protect yourself and the javelina by storing all food inside a vehicle or in the food storage lockers provided at the campsites. Do not leave coolers or food boxes unattended at any time.

Rattlesnakes

Four species of rattlesnakes live in Big Bend National Park—the western diamondback, black-tailed, Mojave, and rock rattlesnakes. This often-feared reptile is beneficial to the environment, eating mice, rats, and other small animals. Perhaps surprising, rattlesnakes are not a top predator. They themselves are often a meal for roadrunners, skunks, coyotes, and even other snakes. The western coachwhip is a notorious rattlesnake predator.

The buzz of a rattlesnake is an unmistakable sound that will stop you in your tracks. Rattlesnakes use this warning when they perceive a threat. Continue toward them and you risk provoking a self-defense bite. A few rattlesnake bites have occurred in Big Bend. If bitten, contact a ranger promptly, as permanent damage can occur within 12 hours of a bite. If possible, note which species bit you. This is important for treatment.

Wild Animal Encounters

For many people, the chance to see a bear or mountain lion in the natural environment is an amazing opportunity. However, one must always remember that we are entering their home, their territory. As such, we need to respect wildlife and know what to do if we encounter a wild predator.

• Do not run but back away to get out of range of the perceived threat.
• If you feel threatened, try to look large, wave your arms, throw rocks or sticks.
• If attacked, fight back.
• Watch children closely and never let them run ahead or lag behind.
• Report bear or mountain lion sightings or encounters to a park ranger as soon as possible.

To help preserve healthy environments for both visitors and predators, please remember:

• Never leave food or trash unattended, as bears and other wildlife easily develop a taste for human food.
• Never feed wildlife since no park animal is tame, and feeding leads to aggressive future behavior.
• Never approach wildlife and always keep a safe distance.

Please Help

At the Lodge
• Leave nothing outside your room, on the balcony, or on the porch.

In Developed Campgrounds
• Store food, beverages, toiletries, pet food, and dishes in the bear-proof storage locker provided at your site.
• Keep your campsite clean. Take trash and food scraps to a dumpster.
• Dump liquids in restroom utility sinks, not on the ground.
• Ice chests and coolers are not bear-proof; store them in your vehicle.

In the Backcountry
• Never leave packs or food unattended. Carry everything with you or store in a bear-proof locker.
• Avoid carrying smelly food and toiletries.
• Carry out all trash, including fruit peels, cigarette butts, and leftover food and cooking grease.

Cyclists
• Use food storage lockers when provided.
Services Outside the Park

These listings are not an endorsement by the National Park Service or Big Bend National Park, nor is this a comprehensive list.

GUIDES/OUTFITTERS

River Trips
- Angel Expeditions: 432-384-2307
- Big Bend Boating & Hiking: 469-607-9889
- Big Bend River Tours: 800-545-4240
- Desert Sports: 432-371-2727
- Far Flung Outdoor Center: 432-371-2633
- Far West Texas Outfitters: 432-229-2054
- Hidden Dagger Adventures: 512-788-1707
- WILD Adventure Outfitters: 432-247-3262

Vehiculc
- Big Bend River Tours: 800-545-4240
- Far Flung Outdoor Center: 432-371-2633
- Get Lost Tours: 432-371-3301
- Go Big Bend: 432-386-5655

Backpacking/Hiking
- Angel Expeditions: 432-384-2307
- Big Bend Boating & Hiking: 469-607-9889
- Explore Big Bend: 432-245-0072
- Far West Texas Outfitters: 432-229-2054
- Get Lost Tours: 432-371-3301
- Go Big Bend: 432-386-5655
- Hidden Dagger Adventures: 512-788-1707
- WILD Adventure Outfitters: 432-247-3262

Bike/Mountain Biking
- Desert Sports: 432-371-2727

Birding Tours
- Big Bend Birding & Photo: 432-386-6855

Photography Tours
- Big Bend Birding & Photo: 432-386-6855

Horseback Riding
- Big Bend Stables: 800-887-4331
- Lajitas Livery: 800-887-4331

GENERAL SERVICES

Convenience Stores/Gasoline
- Big Bend Market: 800-888-2363
- Cottonwood General Store: 432-371-3315
- Stillwell Store & Station: 432-376-2244

Medical Services
- Teflinga Fire & EMS: 911
- Big Bend Medical Center: 432-837-3447

Medical Services
- West Texas National/ATM: 432-371-2121

Information and Services

Emergency Call 911

National Park Service
General Information: 432-477-2251

Big Bend Natural History Association
Booksales & Seminars: 432-477-2236

Visitor Centers
- Panther Junction (Hidalgo): 432-477-1158
- Chisos Basin: 432-477-2264
- Castolon: 432-477-2666
- Persimmon Gap: 432-477-2393
- Rio Grande Village: 432-477-2271

U.S. Post Office
Panther Junction: 432-477-2238

 Lodging/Restaurant
Chisos Mountains Lodge: 432-477-2291

Gas Stations
- Panther Junction: 432-477-2294
- Rio Grande Village: 432-477-2293

Camper Stores
- Rio Grande Village: 432-477-2293
- Chisos Basin: 432-477-2291
- Castolon: 432-477-2222

Vehicles
- Big Bend River Tours: 800-545-4240
- Far Flung Outdoor Center: 432-371-2633
- Get Lost Tours: 432-371-3301
- Go Big Bend: 432-386-5655

Backpacking/Hiking
- Angel Expeditions: 432-384-2307
- Big Bend Boating & Hiking: 469-607-9889
- Explore Big Bend: 432-245-0072
- Far West Texas Outfitters: 432-229-2054
- Get Lost Tours: 432-371-3301
- Go Big Bend: 432-386-5655
- Hidden Dagger Adventures: 512-788-1707
- WILD Adventure Outfitters: 432-247-3262

Bike/Mountain Biking
- Desert Sports: 432-371-2727

Birding Tours
- Big Bend Birding & Photo: 432-386-6855

Photography Tours
- Big Bend Birding & Photo: 432-386-6855

Horseback Riding
- Big Bend Stables: 800-887-4331
- Lajitas Livery: 800-887-4331

General Services
Convenience Stores/Gasoline
- Big Bend Market: 800-888-2363
- Cottonwood General Store: 432-371-3315
- Stillwell Store & Station: 432-376-2244

Medical Services
- Teflinga Fire & EMS: 911
- Big Bend Medical Center: 432-837-3447

Banks
- West Texas National/ATM: 432-371-2121

Volunteers Make the Difference

Big Bend National Park depends on dedicated volunteers to perform many duties throughout the year. Are you ready to volunteer?

Robert and Glenda Overfelt have volunteered at Big Bend National Park for 13 seasons, going back to 2005. “We first visited Big Bend in 1969 and feel that we ‘found our park,’” says Glenda. “Our three children grew up coming to Big Bend at least twice every year, and now our grandchildren visit at least once a year.”

“Volunteering in a national park is a wonderful experience. Having a minimum three-month commitment means you get to truly experience the park. We love the Rio Grande Village area and have always volunteered at the RGV Visitor Center. At a visitor center, you get to help visitors in so many ways. Not just with their entrance fees, but also by answering their questions and helping them plan their time in the park. One of our favorite things to do at the visitor center is work with kids who have completed their Junior Ranger activity books. We have them raise their right hand and recite the Junior Ranger pledge. With the little ones, we get to say ‘Your other right hand’ a lot.”

To us, the highlights of volunteering at Big Bend are the wonderful friends and relationships we have developed, getting to meet people from around the world, and being able to watch the Sierra del Carmen Glow at sunset each evening.”

How Can I Get Involved?
Are you interested in volunteering at Big Bend National Park? Here are some things to keep in mind before submitting an application:

Time Commitment: Volunteers should be able to stay for at least 3 to 6 months.

Housing: Volunteers need to bring an RV or trailer. The park will provide an RV site, electricity, water, and reimburse propane expenses.

Wi-Fi/Internet
Free wireless internet is available at the Panther Junction and Chisos Basin visitor centers, the Chisos Mountains Lodge, and the Rio Grande Village Camp Store.

Recycling
Recycling bins are provided in campgrounds and near stores and visitor centers. Please help us divert trash from our landfill by recycling!

Camp Rules
- Visitors can stay in the park up to 14 consecutive nights.
- Each site has people, tent, and vehicle limits. Make sure your group fits.
- If in a campground, do not leave your site unoccupied. If leaving for the day, leave something in your site so we know you plan to return.
- Generators are only permitted in specific campground sites for specific, limited hours. Do not ever use generators in backcountry sites.

Fires Prohibited
Ground fires and wood fires are prohibited throughout the park. Gas stoves and charcoal contained in a grill may be used. Do not smoke on trails. Smoking is allowed in paved areas, campsites without vegetation, and park roads.

Can’t find what you’re looking for? The website has the answer: www.nps.gov/bibe